

Comprehensive Plan Committee
Minutes March 19, 2002

Members present: David Wiens, Rudy Propst, Art Albrecht, Richard Baugh, Les Bolt, Kathy Sarver, Jim Huffman, Shelley Baker, Carl Wassum, Joe Fitzgerald, Robert Steere, and Dorn Peterson

Members absent: Margaret Haynes

Staff present: Stacy Turner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Earl W. Anderson, Senior Planner; and Keith Markel, Planner

Mr. Peterson called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m. and called for nominations for the election of a new Chair.

Mr. Fitzgerald motioned to nominate Jim Huffman as Chair.

Mr. Wiens seconded.

Mr. Huffman accepted and a vote was called. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.

Mr. Huffman then asked for nominations for Vice-Chair.

Mr. Wiens motioned to nominate Dorn Peterson as Vice-Chair.

Mr. Steere seconded.

Mr. Peterson accepted and a vote was called. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.

The members present each made short introductions.

Mr. Markel discussed the notebooks and their contents.

Mr. Anderson explained the Comprehensive Plan process, by reasoning why it is done and how other localities have accomplished their five year review.

Mrs. Turner gave further insights into the Comprehensive Plan process and answered questions about the Zoning Ordinance as an implementation tool of the Comprehensive Plan and how far in the future a locality should look.

There was discussion on how the Committee could accomplish the process of input from the citizens.

Mr. Wiens noted that they should include minorities and take steps to listen to this community's concerns.

Mr. Huffman agreed and stated that as many as possible should be involved in the process. The Committee should establish several public input meetings to gather information from the public.

Ms. Baker stated that they needed to especially focus on breaking the language barrier, so that the non-English speakers understand that the City values their opinions.

Mr. Wiens also, suggested going beyond public input meetings and have several types of surveys out in the community.

Mr. Bolt discussed how churches were a good source for reaching minorities and this would be an excellent way to see the multitude of visions people have about the City. There is probably going to be a lot of commonalities and those will be the backbone for what the Comprehensive Plan represents.

Mr. Albrecht stated that the real challenge is to get the public input early. Possibly by presenting an issue for change in the community, would bring out some strong ideas.

Mr. Huffman agreed and said that if a novel zoning idea was proposed then that would help in gaining public attention and input.

Mr. Propst said that during the Rockingham County public participation process the actual public input spurred the involvement. When people saw how much they were being listened to they in turn encouraged others to be involved.

Mr. Steere stated that there are two types of consultants. The first is involved in the process and pushes for public input. The other is the status quo pencil pusher, who only does what is needed. The City needs the first type, because from the experience he has heard about from Rockingham County, their consultant pushed for the public to be involved and that has made all the difference for their Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Huffman asked what was the next step?

Mr. Anderson reviewed the process and that the Committee would need to start informing themselves as to the many processes that could occur and figure out how they wanted to proceed.

Mr. Bolt asked if there was a consensus of internal ideas for the process, but first they should possibly set up some ground rules.

Mr. Albrecht asked what was Rockingham County's process?

The members discussed what they had heard about the process and asked staff to invite someone from Rockingham County to discuss the process they went through.

Mrs. Turner then discussed the 1992 Comprehensive Plan as being a broad sweeping change in the community. A consultant was hired and used to implement the changes as they were written out in the Comprehensive Plan. Due to the unpopularity the changes spurred, the 1998 Comprehensive Plan review was done by City staff and did not include much public input.

Mr. Wassum stated that they really did need to gather public input, however, the committee needed to act as a filter for the incoming information.

Mr. Huffman stated that to make zoning work there is an element of making people do things that they may not want to do.

Mr. Wiens impressed the need to include major discussion of the downtown area and the revitalization that needs to occur.

Mr. Steere discussed the need to keenly look at residential and commercial areas and create a mix of those two for some areas of the City.

Mr. Huffman discussed the Bagwell rezoning that recently appeared before the Planning Commission. That property could have benefited from the revitalization a mixed use zoning classification could have offered.

Mr. Wiens stated that there needed to be some innovative ways developed to address those kinds of issues. Possibly overlays could be used to give additional benefits to areas like the area around Bagwell's property on North Main Street.

The Committee then agreed to meet on the third Tuesday of each month up until the request for proposal is sent out for bids. They also discussed some of the interest groups they would like to here comment from during the Comprehensive Plan process, such as the School Board and environmental interests.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 p.m.